

Smile

BY MEG CROWLEY

I rose at the sight of your green Passat pulling up to the curb. I slid inside, clipped my seat belt on, then we were on our way. I faced you. "Are you ready?"

"Jane," you replied in your spun-sugar voice, "I swore on my teddy bear that I would find my birth mother."

"I remember the sleepover when you did that. How old were we, six?"

"Yep." A smile tugged at the corner of your mouth. "Twelve years ago. I'm a big girl now. I'm going to meet her." You were already the world to your adoptive parents, whom you loved unconditionally, but one of your major hallmarks was that you were always true to your word. "I've dreamt so many times about today." You turned onto the highway.

"I know," I said, remembering last week right after finals when we'd locked ourselves in your dorm room with my Mac, copies of your adoption papers, and a freezer full of Ben & Jerry's. We vowed not to sleep until we found your birth mother's home address. Our first Google search of Rowena Levin had brought us to a website of a prestigious law firm which happened to be in Oakland—just miles away from UC Berkeley. After twenty minutes of explaining your predicament to the law firm's secretary, you had Rowena's address saved in your iPhone. And here we were, driving down College Avenue to 5359 Manila Avenue to scope out the life you could've had.

"I wonder what she's like." Your voice was thick with intrigue. Aside from being an exceptional lawyer, all we knew about Rowena from your adoption papers was that she was thirty-seven.

I pondered. "She's probably tall; wide-eyed and regal looking just like you."

You blushed and exited the freeway. "What if she doesn't like me?" Your voice was small as you turned onto Manila Avenue.

"Who wouldn't like you, Addie?"

You beamed and stopped the car in front of a cream-colored house about halfway down the block.

This was it.

"Good luck," I said, reading your wish-me-luck look.

Robotically, you unbuckled your seat belt and warily stepped out of the car. You climbed seven concrete stairs that were adorned with pictures of flowers and smiling suns in sidewalk chalk. The front lot was invaded by lush grass and void of weeds. Blue curtains blocked the view of the inside of the house. I watched you wait on the porch, then step inside.

Forty-five minutes later, I looked up to see you slide into the car. "How'd it go?"

You didn't speak. "Addie?" The silence itched like a mosquito bite.

A smile bloomed on your lips while a tear ran down your cheek. "Rowena Levin will never know," you said defiantly. You shed a few more tears, but the smile was still plastered on your face.

"Know what?" I kept my voice light, even though I was dying for details.

"How lucky I am. Thanks for coming with me today, Jane." Hastily, you started the car and drove away from the cream-colored house. You drove away from your birth mother, whom you never spoke of again.